

Asset #14: Parents and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ROLE MODELS

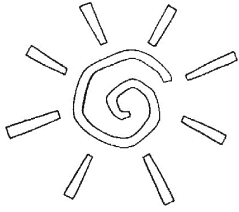
People of all ages need to feel that they can make a contribution and play a meaningful role in their community, whether it's at home, at school, or in the neighborhood. Research shows that youth who feel valued and useful have higher self-esteem, a greater sense of personal control, reduced delinquency, greater social and personal responsibility, reduced substance abuse, and better social skills.

- Higher levels of self esteem
- Reduced use of tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, and hard drugs
- Improved high school graduation rates
- Greater aspirations and expectations for their careers

A positive role model doesn't have to have any unusual characteristics or skills—you don't have to be a sports hero or a billionaire for youth to look up to you. In fact, most youth who have role models identified caring friends and relatives from their direct social environment as role models. Every single one of us has the potential to make a difference in the lives of young people—all that matters is your willingness to take the time to get to know a young person and let them get to know you, and to share your experience and knowledge.

The following discussion topics can help young people recognize the role models that influence their lives:

- What's the difference between a hero and a role model?
- Are celebrities like sports stars, actors, and musicians good role models? Why or why not?
- Which adults whom you know do you admire? Why?
- What have you learned from adults that has helped or inspired you?
- What would you like to be able to talk about more with adults?



ACTIVITIES

FOR ALL ADULTS

- Make a point of talking about people you admire or who had a positive influence on you, and why. Ask a young person to do the same.
- Share stories and experiences that reflect positive values, such as when a friend treated you with honesty or a coworker behaved responsibly. This can help young people develop a better understanding of their own values and how to act in different situations.
- Take the time to pass on your special skills. Youth often appreciate the opportunity to learn new skills, even if they've never been exposed to them before.
- In conversation, provide opportunities for youth to discuss their view of the world.
- Model integrity by following through on any commitments that you make, especially with young people.
- Demonstrate positive responses to difficult situations, such as offering a sincere apology when appropriate, or trying again when you fail to achieve a goal.

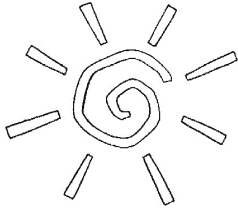
FOR ADULTS WHO WORK DIRECTLY WITH YOUTH

Adults who work with young people are potential role models; it's up to you to demonstrate the positive behaviors that will be expected of adults:

- Model hard work, a positive attitude, and respect for others. Avoid making negative comments about coworkers, sports teams and players, and others with whom you compare yourself or compete.
- Be sure that you and your staff "walk your talk" by modeling respect and trust among coworkers.

AT SCHOOL OR IN YOUTH PROGRAMS

- Throughout the month, discuss the importance of role models and what qualities are important.



- Have youth make a role model collage: First, have participants collect or create pictures and drawings of their role models. Then, have them cut out words or phrases that describe these role models from magazines and newspapers, or write the words or phrases themselves. Finally, glue the images and words onto construction paper or poster board, and hang the collage where the youth can be inspired by their creation each day.
- Help youth identify the difference between positive and negative role models in the media: First, hang two pieces of newsprint or poster board on the wall. Label one “Positive Role Models” and the other “Negative Role Models.” Hand out different kinds of recent magazines and newspapers, including teen, news, sports, and entertainment magazines. Ask youth to cut out pictures of newsmakers and celebrities, and tape or glue the pictures under the appropriate category. Discuss who they chose and why; whether some of the people could appear in both categories; and how to judge whether a celebrity or newsmaker is a good role model.
- Discuss ways that the youth can be role models for younger children at school or in the program, and create opportunities for the older youth to spend positive time with the younger children, such as reading together or working together on projects.

**This article was provided courtesy of Project Cornerstone.
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